DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 703 PS 027 523

TITLE State Funding of Head Start.
INSTITUTION Idaho State Legislature, Boise. Office of Performance Evaluation.
PUB DATE 1999-02-00
NOTE 7p.; "Background Paper/Evaluation Proposal, with errata incorporated."
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS At Risk Persons; Educational Finance; Evaluation Research; *Financial Support; Low Income Groups; *Outcomes of Education; *Preschool Education; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS Idaho; *Preschool Effects; *Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

This background paper details Head Start, a federally funded program serving preschool age children from low-income families, and focuses on the program's effectiveness and the adequacy of historic federal funding levels. The paper provides an overview of the Head Start Program, describes federal requirements for local programs, and describes Head Start services in Idaho. The paper also details federal Head Start appropriations, enrollment, and costs per child from fiscal year 1995 to 1999, both nationally and for Idaho. In addition, the paper lists the states providing no state funding for Head Start, those providing direct state funding for Head Start, and those with state-funded pre-kindergarten programs other than Head Start. The paper notes although it is difficult to determine the overall impact and effectiveness of Head Start nationwide because of the variation in local programs, recent research concerning local programs has generally found them to be effective in preparing children for school. However, the General Accounting Office has concluded that the existing body of studies was not sufficient to develop a national estimate of the impact of Head Start and recommended that the Department of Health and Human Services conduct a nationwide assessment of the impact of Head Start programs. The Department of Health and Human Services maintains that existing research has already provided clear evidence of the positive impacts of Head Start services. The paper concludes with a list of proposed evaluation questions for Idaho Head Start programs. (KB)

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ED 429 703

State Funding of Head Start

OFFICE OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

February 1999

At the request of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee, we have prepared a background paper regarding Head Start, a federally funded program that serves pre-school age children from low-income families. During each legislative session since 1994, the Legislature has considered legislation to provide state funding for Head Start. However, the legislation has always been unsuccessful due to funding considerations. Questions brought to the Oversight Committee centered around the program's effectiveness and the adequacy of historic federal funding levels.

To prepare this paper we reviewed reports from the federal General Accounting Office and the federal Department of Health and Human Services. We also reviewed literature published by national societies for early childhood education. We spoke with a federal official who oversees and monitors Head Start in the Pacific Northwest and an official of the Idaho Head Start Association.

BACKGROUND

Overview of Federal Head Start Program

The federal Head Start program was established in 1965, with the primary goal of improving the social competence of children in low-income families through education and auxiliary services.[1] The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Head Start Bureau administers the Head Start program.

The federal Head Start program has four components. According to a study issued in 1997, most children (85 percent) enrolled participate in *regular* Head Start, the objective of which is to work with children at least one school year before they enter kindergarten.[2] According to the same study, about 90 percent of regular Head Start participants enter the program at age three or four. *Early* Head Start, established in 1994, provides services to children under age three as well as expectant mothers. The federal Head Start Bureau also funds separate initiatives for migrant and Native American populations.

During federal fiscal year 1997, the bureau awarded grants to more than 1,400 local public and private not-for-profit agencies ("grantees") nationally, which in turn developed and administered Head Start programs locally. In federal fiscal year 1997, grantees served 793,809 children nationwide.[3]

Federal Requirements of Local Head Start Programs

To ensure that all local programs meet certain minimum standards, the federal Head Start Bureau requires grantees to meet certain program performance standards. These standards set out the processes grantees must follow to assess community needs, set goals, and develop and implement plans to meet those needs. Performance standards also cover program governance, record keeping,

[1] U.S. General Accounting Office. *Head Start Programs: Participant Characteristics, Services, and Funding.* GAO/HEHS-98-65 (Washington, DC: General Accounting Office, 1998), 4.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *Head Start 1998 Fact Sheet.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (visited Dec. 7, 1998), <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/facts98.htm>.

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reporting, and fiscal management. Within these guidelines, local programs can vary considerably.[4]

Under federal guidelines, Head Start grantees must provide a wide range of services.

- Grantees must provide educational programs that encourage children to solve problems, initiate activities, explore, experiment, question, and gain mastery through learning by doing.
- Staff members must visit the children's homes to assess the children's and their families' needs and recommend home activities to reinforce classroom experiences.
- Participating children must receive thorough medical and dental screenings and program staff members must ensure that follow-up services are arranged for all health problems found.
- When needed, Head Start staff members must arrange for a variety of family services, including parent literacy, social services, job training, and mental health.[5]
- Grantees must involve parents in developing the program of services for children, including curriculum development, home visits, and delivery of health care services.
- Grantees must work with parents to develop family goals and to identify and access needed services. Parents also may volunteer at the children centers and sit on the grantees' policy councils.

Head Start in Idaho

Head Start has been active in Idaho since it began nationally in 1965. Currently, Head Start services are delivered by 13 local grantee agencies. Each grantee provides services through one or more centers, each of which may have one or more classrooms. Table 1 summarizes the numbers of grantees, centers, and participants for the year beginning October 1997. As shown, most federal funding currently goes toward regular Head Start.

Table 1: Idaho Head Start Agencies for Federal Fiscal Year 1998

Type	Number of Grantees	Number of Centers	Children Enrolled
Regular	8	36	2,058
Early	1[a]	2	163
Native American	3	5	213
Migrant	1	9	696
Total	13	52	3,130

[a] A second Early Head Start grantee also operates regular Head Start and is one of the eight listed.

Source: Idaho Head Start Association, *Executive Summary of Idaho Head Start Data* (1998), 8–18.

In federal fiscal year 1997, 2,213 Idaho children were enrolled in regular or early Head Start.[6] Of these, 96 percent received medical and dental screenings and immunizations, 323 were children with disabilities and 120 were referred to treatment programs for emotional and behavioral problems. Idaho regular and early Head Start together referred 1,529 families to social services.

The Idaho Head Start Association estimates that about 21 percent of eligible Idaho children are enrolled in Head Start this year.[7] Head Start is not available in seven Idaho counties.[8]

[4] 45 C.F.R. §§ 1301-08 (1996).

[5] Ibid., 6.

[6] Idaho Head Start Association, *Executive Summary of Idaho Head Start Data* (Boise: 1998), 1–6.

[7] Katherine Pavesic, *Idaho Head Start 1999 Transition Document* (Boise: Idaho Head Start Assoc., 1998), 5-1.

[8] There are no Head Start services for Butte, Clark, Custer, Fremont, Jefferson, Lemhi, and Madison Counties.

As previously noted, local Head Start programs vary. At some centers, children come two mornings each week and the Head Start teacher or center manager visits each child's home once each week. Other centers receive children four mornings each week with fewer home visits. In some rural areas, the educational experience is provided at home and the children come once each month to a center to socialize with each other.

Idaho and all other states participate in the Head Start-State Collaboration Project. The purpose of this federal project is to ensure Head Start involvement in state plans and policies that affect the Head Start target population. The collaboration project promotes partnerships among state agencies, local governments, community organizations, and Head Start grantees. In federal fiscal year 1999, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare received a $100,000 federal grant to be the lead agency for the Head Start-State Collaboration Project. The department has entered into a contract with the Idaho Head Start Association to perform this function.

Program Funding

According to a 1998 federal General Accounting Office report, Head Start has served over 16 million children at a total cost of $35 billion since its inception. For federal fiscal year 1999, Congress appropriated more than $4.6 billion for Head Start, representing an increase of 9.8 percent over the previous year. Table 2 shows a summary of the past five years' appropriations and related enrollments.

Unlike many federal grant programs, Head Start funds are distributed directly to local grantees. The federal Head Start Bureau distributes funds based on a complex formula that takes into account, among other things, the previous allotments grantees received and the number of children age five and under below the poverty line in each state.

To receive Head Start grants, local grantees must obtain at least 20 percent of their total funding for Head Start from nonfederal sources. These matching funds can be in the

Table 2: Federal Head Start Appropriations, Enrollment, and Costs Per Child Nationally, Federal Fiscal Years 1995–1999

	Appropriation for Head Start	Change From Previous Year[a]	Enrollment	Change From Previous Year	Funding Per Child
FFY 1995	$3.5 billion	+6.3%	750,696	+1.4%	$4,708
FFY 1996	3.6 billion	+1.0	752,077	+0.2	4,746
FFY 1997	3.9 billion	+8.6	793,809	+5.5	4,884
FFY 1998	4.2 billion	+9.5	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.
FFY 1999	4.7 billion	+9.8	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.

[a] Change calculated prior to rounding of appropriations.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Head Start Fact Sheet*, 1996–1998 (visited Dec. 7, 1998), <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/facts96.htm, /facts97.htm, and facts98.htm>; Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, Program 93.600 Head Start (visited Feb. 12, 1999), <http://www.aspe.os.dhhs.gov/cfda/p93600.htm>.

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form of cash from states and local governments, private cash donations, or in-kind contributions such as facilities and equipment.[9]

The federal Head Start Bureau uses several monitoring and oversight tools to help ensure grantees comply with program requirements and assess their performance.

- Every three years each grantee must undergo an extensive on-site evaluation by an interdisciplinary team from the bureau's regional office. The team members assess the grantee's compliance with established performance standards in 17 core elements, including planning, fiscal management, health care, curriculum, and parent involvement.[10]
- Each grantee must submit a grant renewal application each year and a Program Information Report every six months.
- Each grantee must establish a Policy Council to be responsible for developing program goals and objectives.[11]

Federal Funding to Head Start Agencies in Idaho

Table 3 shows total annual allotments to Idaho grantees during the last four years, grantees' enrollment in regular and early Head Start, and calculated funding per enrolled child in Idaho.

As shown, between federal fiscal years 1996 and 1997, federal funding to Idaho grantees increased noticeably, exceeding the overall national rate of increase in Head Start funding

[9] General Accounting Office, *Head Start Programs: Participant Characteristics, Services, and Funding*, GAO/HEHS-98-65 (Washington, DC: General Accounting Office, 1998), 6.

[10] Letter from Leslie Jenkins, Head Start Project Officer, Region X, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to Jim Henderson, Performance Evaluator, Office of Performance Evaluations (Dec. 4, 1998) (on file).

Table 3: Federal Head Start Funding to Idaho Grantees, Enrollment, and Costs Per Child, Regular and Early Head Start, Federal Fiscal Years 1995–1999

	Total Federal Allotment	Enrollment	Calculated Funding Per Child
FFY 1995	$10,009,000	1,841	$5,437
FFY 1996	10,043,000	1,869	5,373
FFY 1997	12,529,000	2,213	5,662
FFY 1998[a]	11,697,798	2,221	5,267
FFY 1999[a]	12,160,890	not avail.	not avail.

[a] Data does not include funding or enrollment at Bear River Head Start in Preston, Idaho, which is a delegate agency of a Head Start grantee in Logan, Utah, nor quality assurance-cost-of-living funds, which may increase the total allotment by four to five percent.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Head Start Fact Sheet*, 1996–1998 (visited Dec. 7, 1998), <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/facts96.htm>, <facts 97.htm>, <facts98.htm>; Telephone Interview with Barry Morrisroe, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Administration for Children and Families*, Region X (Feb. 16, 1999).

noted in Table 2. Idaho's enrollment also increased at a greater rate than the national average during this period. The data for federal fiscal years 1998 and 1999 are incomplete. However, it appears funding per child declined somewhat in 1998.

As Tables 2 and 3 show, Idaho Head Start grantees have received more funding per enrolled child on average than the national average in each year since federal fiscal year 1995. However, nationally, the costs per child can vary noticeably due in part to variations in transportation and other operating costs. In federal fiscal year 1997, costs per child ranged from $3,777 in Arkansas to $6,600 in Oregon.

State Head Start Funding—Other States

According to the National Head Start Association, Head Start enrolls an average of about 40 percent of eligible children nationwide.[12] Many states supplement federal Head Start funds with state funding for Head Start or other pre-kindergarten programs. A recent study found that 39 states have either supplemented federal Head Start funding, funded a separate, pre-kindergarten program, or both.[13] Table 4 summarizes state pre-kindergarten funding nationally.

Note that state funding of Head Start does not increase the amount or availability of federal funds provided. Rather, it increases total funding, which could increase the number of programs or the scope of existing programs.

Effectiveness of Head Start

Because of variation in local Head Start programs, the overall impact and effectiveness of Head Start nationwide is difficult to determine. However, recent research concerning local Head Start programs has generally found the programs to be effective.

[12] Government Affairs Committee, National Head Start Association, *Position Paper: Block Grants are not the Approach for Head Start* (October 1994).

[13] Anne Mitchell, *Pre-Kindergarten Programs Funded by the States: Essential Elements for Policy Makers* (New York: Families and Work Institute, 1998), 5–6.

Table 4: State Head Start and Other Pre-Kindergarten Programs, 1998

No State Funding	Direct State Funding of Head Start		State-Funded Pre-Kindergarten Programs Other Than Head Start[b]		
Alabama	Alaska	New Jersey[a]	Arizona	Kentucky	Oregon
Idaho	Connecticut[a]	Ohio[a]	Arkansas	Louisiana	Pennsylvania
Indiana	Hawaii[a]	Oklahoma[a]	California	Maryland	South Carolina
Kansas	Maine[a]	Rhode Island[a]	Colorado	Michigan	Tennessee
Mississippi	Massachusetts[a]	Washington[a]	Delaware	Missouri	Texas
Montana	Minnesota[a]	Wisconsin[a]	Florida	Nebraska	Vermont
Nevada	New Hampshire		Georgia	New Mexico	Virginia
North Dakota			Illinois	New York	West Virginia
South Dakota			Iowa	North Carolina	
Utah					
Wyoming					

[a] Fund Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs other than Head Start.
[b] In some states, these monies may be awarded to Head Start applicants.

Source: Anne Mitchell, *Pre-Kindergarten Programs Funded by the States: Essential Elements for Policy Makers* (New York: Families and Work Institute, 1998), 5–6.

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In a study published in 1997, the federal General Accounting Office reviewed more than 200 studies of Head Start and conducted an in-depth analysis of 22. These studies generally found Head Start to be effective in preparing children for school.[14] However, each of these 22 studies was limited in its scope in terms of the population examined and the range of Head Start services evaluated. As a result, the General Accounting Office concluded that the existing body of studies was not sufficient to develop a national estimate of the impact of Head Start and recommended the Department of Health and Human Services conduct a nationwide assessment of the impact of Head Start programs. The Department of Health and Human Services, on the other hand, maintained that existing research has already provided clear evidence of the positive impacts of Head Start Services.[15]

EVALUATION ISSUES

As noted, many states have provided funding for Head Start or other pre-kindergarten programs, largely as a means of serving more children. In Idaho, state funding for Head Start has been proposed, unsuccessfully, during previous legislative sessions. We were unable to locate any definitive studies of local programs. Consequently, we were not able to assess the effectiveness of Idaho's programs to date. Further, the only assessment of need we could locate was conducted by the Idaho Head Start Association.

An evaluation could ask:

- How does Idaho compare to other states, in terms of the percent of children that participate in state or federally funded pre-kindergarten programs and the total level of funding for each child?
- What other pre-kindergarten programs are available to children in Idaho? What percentage of children participate?
- How many low-income children in Idaho currently do not receive pre-kindergarten services?
- What elements of pre-kindergarten programs nationally have been shown to be most effective? How do Idaho programs compare to the most successful nationally?
- What would be the likely impact on existing federal and match funding levels if the state provided funding for Head Start?

[14] The studies compared Head Start children with similarly situated non-Head Start children in their early grades. The comparisons were based on rates of retention in grade, cognitive and socioemotional test scores, and various measurements of health.

[15] General Accounting Office. *Head Start: Research Provides Little Information on Impact of Current Program*, GAO/HEHS-97-59 (Washington, DC: General Accounting Office, 1997), 18–21.

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